

Misplaced Modifiers

- *Crossing the street I saw John Dunsworth.*
- *I saw John Dunsworth crossing the street.*
- *Forty students got the flu from Astronomy 1101.*
- *Forty students from Astronomy 1101 got the flu.*

All those sentences are correct, but they mean something different, or even something ridiculous.

Modifiers are words or groups of words that change the meaning of a noun or verb. (An **easy** chair is a very different thing from an **electric** chair.) Modifiers are usually very close to the word they modify; if you put it somewhere else, the meaning may be changed or confused. The reader may even get a chuckle you hadn't intended.

Solution

Reread what you put down, trying your best to see what the words say, not what you intended them to say. If necessary, move the modifier to the right place.

Limiting Modifiers

- *Annabelle runs only marathons.* (She despises 5K and 10K runs.)
- *Annabelle only runs marathons.* (She never walks them.)
- *I only lend books.* (I never give or sell them.)
- *I lend only books.* (I never lend CDs or DVDs.)

Pay special attention to the placement of limiting modifiers such as *almost, nearly, only, simply, even*. In spoken language the meaning is usually clear. In writing, be careful to put the limiting modifier immediately before the idea being limited.

Dangling modifiers

- *After writing the essay, the secretary date-stamped it.*

If a modifying word or phrase doesn't actually have something to modify, we say it is dangling. (The secretary did not write the essay.) It usually happens when we begin a sentence with an introductory modifier, and then change direction without realizing it.

Solution

Rework the sentence, adding the missing element.

- *After writing the essay, the student gave it to the secretary for a date-stamp.*